



# TENNYSON

## SELECTED POEMS

*THE LOTOS-EATERS      ULYSSES*  
*DEATH OF THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON*  
*THE COMING OF ARTHUR AND*  
*THE PASSING OF ARTHUR*

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EDITED BY  
C. B. WHEELER AND F. A. CAVENAGH

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TENNYSON  
LOTOS-EATERS

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## NOTE

*The Lotos-Eaters* appeared in the *Poems* of 1833 and 1842. In the latest edition it forms part, like *Oenone*, of the group entitled *The Lady of Shalott, and other Poems*. It was set to music by Dr. Parry in 1892.

## INTRODUCTION

EARLY in the ten years' journey home from Troy, Odysseus came with his comrades to the land of the Lotos-eaters. In the *Odyssey* (ix. 82-104) he relates to King Alcinous how after leaving the country of the Cicones (Thrace) they were driven by a tempest from the north past Cape Malea and Cythera (Cerigo). 'Thence for nine whole days was I borne by ruinous winds over the teeming deep ; but on the tenth day we set foot on the land of the lotus-eaters, who eat a flowery food. So we stepped ashore and drew water, and straightway my company took their midday meal by the swift ships. Now when we had tasted meat and drink I sent forth certain of my company to go and make search [what manner of men they were who here live upon the earth by bread, and I chose out two of my fellows, and sent a third with them as herald].<sup>1</sup> Then straightway they went and mixed with the men of the lotus-eaters, and so it was that the lotus-eaters devised not death for our fellows, but gave them of the lotus to taste. Now whosoever of them did eat the honey-sweet fruit of the lotus, had no more wish to bring tidings nor to come back, but there he chose to abide with the lotus-eating men, ever feeding on the lotus, and forgetful of his homeward way. Therefore I led them back to the ships weeping, and sore against their will, and dragged them beneath the benches, and bound them in the hollow barques. But I commanded the rest of my well-loved company to make speed

<sup>1</sup> Lines 89 and 90 are probably interpolated.



and go on board the swift ships, lest haply any should eat of the lotus and be forgetful of returning. Right soon they embarked and sat upon the benches, and sitting orderly they smote the grey sea-water with their oars.' (Butcher and Lang's translation.)

The subtle charm of these few lines Tennyson has seized and developed with his peculiar genius. He has supplied a background of scenery as beautiful as it is harmonious with the general atmosphere of the poem: everything is saturated with the influence of the lotus. Apart too from its beauty, the poem is perhaps the most perfect expression of the drowsy, sensuous mood that is apt at times to overcome the most vigorous natures. Those who seek a moral in all they read may easily find one here—the forgetfulness of duty that results from self-indulgence. But a poem of such consummate art cannot have been primarily didactic: we should enjoy it rather as the interpretation of an ancient theme by one of the greatest modern poets.

## THE LOTOS-EATERS

'COURAGE!' he said, and pointed toward the land,  
'This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon.'  
In the afternoon they came unto a land  
In which it seemed always afternoon.  
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,  
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.  
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;  
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream  
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke, 10  
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;  
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,  
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.  
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow  
From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,  
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,  
Stood sunset-flush'd: and, dew'd with showery drops,  
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

The charmed sunset linger'd low adown  
In the red West: thro' mountain clefts the dale 20  
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down  
Border'd with palm, and many a winding vale  
And meadow, set with slender galingale;  
A land where all things always seem'd the same!  
And round about the keel with faces pale,  
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,  
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,  
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave  
To each, but whoso did receive of them, 30  
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave  
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave  
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,  
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;  
And deep-asleep he seem'd, yet all awake,  
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand,  
 Between the sun and moon upon the shore;  
 And sweet it was to dream of Fatheland,  
 Of child, and wife, and slave, but evermore 40  
 Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar.  
 Weary the wandering fields of barren foam  
 Then some one said, 'We will return no more;  
 And all at once they sang, 'Our island home  
 Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam.

## CHORIC SONG

## I

There is sweet music here that softer falls  
 Than petals from blown roses on the grass,  
 Or night-dews on still waters between walls  
 Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;  
 Music that gentlier on the spirit lies, 50  
 Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes,  
 Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful  
 skies.  
 Here are cool mosses deep,  
 And thro' the moss the ivies creep,  
 And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,  
 And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

## II

Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,  
 And utterly consumed with sharp distress,  
 While all things else have rest from weariness?  
 All things have rest: why should we toil alone, 60  
 We only toil, who are the first of things,  
 And make perpetual moan,  
 Still from one sorrow to another thrown:  
 Nor ever fold our wings,  
 And cease from wanderings,  
 Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm;  
 Nor hearken what the inner spirit sings,  
 'There is no joy but calm!'  
 Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?

## III

Lo! in the middle of the wood, 70  
 The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud  
 With winds upon the branch, and there  
 Grows green and broad, and takes no care,  
 Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon  
 Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow  
 Falls, and floats adown the air.  
 Lo! sweeten'd with the summer light,  
 The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,  
 Drops in a silent autumn night.  
 All its allotted length of days, 80  
 The flower ripens in its place,  
 Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,  
 Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.

## IV

Hateful is the dark-blue sky,  
 Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea.  
 Death is the end of life; ah, why  
 Should life all labour be?  
 Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,  
 And in a little while our lips are dumb.  
 Let us alone. What is it that will last? 90  
 All things are taken from us, and become  
 Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.  
 Let us alone. What pleasure can we have  
 To war with evil? Is there any peace  
 In ever climbing up the climbing wave?  
 All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave  
 In silence; ripen, fall and cease:  
 Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

## V

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,  
 With half-shut eyes ever to seem 100  
 Falling asleep in a half-dream!  
 To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,  
 Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height;  
 To hear each other's whisper'd speech;  
 Eating the Lotos day by day,  
 To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,

And tender curving lines of creamy spray,  
 To lend our hearts and spirits wholly  
 To the influence of mild-minded melancholy.  
 To muse and brood and live again in memory, 110  
 With those old faces of our infancy  
 Heap'd over with a mound of grass,  
 Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass !

## VI

Dear is the memory of our wedded lives.  
 And dear the last embraces of our wives  
 And their warm tears but all hath suffer'd change;  
 For surely now our household hearths are cold  
 Our sons inherit us: our looks are strange.  
 And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.  
 Or else the island princes over-bold 120  
 Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings  
 Before them of the ten-years' war in Troy,  
 And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things  
 Is there confusion in the little isle?  
 Let what is broken so remain  
 The Gods are hard to reconcile:  
 'Tis hard to settle order once again.  
 There is confusion worse than death,  
 Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,  
 Long labour unto aged breath, 130  
 Sore task to hearts worn out with many wars  
 And eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars.

## VII

But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly,  
 How sweet (while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly)  
 With half-dropt eyelids still.  
 Beneath a heaven dark and holy,  
 To watch the long bright river drawing slowly  
 His waters from the purple hill—  
 To hear the dewy echoes calling  
 From cave to cave thro' the thick-twined vine— 140  
 To watch the emerald-colour'd water falling  
 Thro' many a wov'n acanthus-wreath divine!  
 Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,  
 Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine.

## VIII

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak :  
The Lotos blows by every winding creek :  
All day the wind breathes low with mellow tone :  
Thio' every hollow cave and alley lone  
Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotos-  
dust is blown.

We have had enough of action, and of motion we, 150  
Roll'd to starboard, roll'd to larboard, when the surge  
was seething free,

Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains  
in the sea.

Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,  
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined  
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.  
For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurl'd  
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly  
curl'd

Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming  
world :

Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,  
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps  
and fiery sands, 160

Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships,  
and praying hands.

But they smile, they find a music centred in a doleful  
song

Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,  
Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong ;  
Chanted from an ill-used race of men that cleave the soil,  
Sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil,  
Storing yearly little dues of wheat, and wine and oil ;  
Till they perish and they suffer—some, 'tis whisper'd—  
down in hell

Suffer endless anguish, others in Elysian valleys dwell,  
Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel. 170  
Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore  
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and  
oar ;

Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

## NOTES

THE name *Lotos* was applied in antiquity to at least five different plants (see Liddell and Scott, *s v* λωτός). That of the *Odyssey* was the Cyrenean Lotus, a low prickly shrub (Hdt. 11. 96); its fruit was about the size of the mastich berry (1 e. the size of an olive), and as sweet as the date (1b iv 177). It has been identified with various plants, 'according to Wildenow, it was the *Zizyphus Lotus*, still prized at Tunis and Tripoli under the name of the jujube, the fruit of paradise in Arab poetry' (L & S., *l c.*)

The land of the Lotus eaters (Lotophagi) was supposed by some ancient authorities to be a district in N. Africa near the Lesser Syrtis (1 e. the south of Tunis), and by others the island of Meninx (mod. Jerba) opposite to that coast. Herodotus relates that the Lotophagi subsist entirely on the lotus, and that they make wine from its fruit, but he says nothing of its narcotic properties. Pliny, however, repeats the substance of the ancient story, 'the inhabitants', he says, 'are very kind and hospitable, so that those who call there are so taken with their courtesy and the sweetness of their food, that they are wont never to return to their homes unless against their will and under compulsion' (v 4). And that this people had even earlier passed into a proverb is shown by Xen. *Anab.* iii 2 25, where Xenophon urges his men not to be so captivated by the Persian luxury that 'like the Lotophagi they may forget the homeward road'.

This *Lotos* should not be confused with the symbolic lotus of Egyptian ritual, which was a kind of lily, not with that mentioned in 'Oenone', l. 96. In point of fact, no variety of the lotus produces the effects mentioned by Homer.

1 *he*: Odysseus.

11. *Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn*: in a letter of Nov. 21, 1882, to S. E. Dawson, of Montreal, Tennyson wrote

'When I was about twenty or twenty-one I went on a tour to the Pyrenees. Lying among these mountains before a waterfall [in the Cirque de Gavarnie] that comes down one thousand or twelve hundred feet, I sketched it (according to my custom then) in these words:

Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn.

When I printed this, a critic informed me that "lawn" was

the material used in theatres to imitate a waterfall, and graciously added, "Mr. T. should not go to the boards of a theatre but to Nature herself for his suggestions" And I *had* gone to Nature herself. I think it is a moot point whether if I had known how that effect was produced on the stage, I should have ventured to publish the line.' (*Memor.*, p. 216)

*Lawn* is a kind of fine linen, used particularly for bishops' sleeves. The name is probably derived from Laon in the north-east of France.

18. *clomb*. an archaic past tense of 'clumb', found in Spenser's *woien* 'thick, dense, tangled.'

19. *charmed*. as partaking of the general languor of the country

23. *galingale*: probably Tennyson intended the English galingale, a kind of sedge.

34. *thin, as voices from the grave* it was the classical conception that the spirits of the dead 'did squeak and gibber', cf. *Odyssey* xxiv. 5, *Virg. Aen.* vi. 492

42. *barren*: ἀργύρεος, the usual Homeric epithet of the sea.

44. *Our island home*: Ithaca, to the west of Greece.

*Choric*: i.e. like the Chorus in a Greek play. The word *chorus*, meaning originally a 'dance', came to be used for the band of players who danced and sang during the play. Their odes were usually composed in very complicated measures, with strophe and corresponding antistrophe, epode, &c. Here, 'choric' means little more than a song sung by a company.

-73. *takes no care* there is perhaps a reminiscence (cf. *inf.* l. 82, 'hath no toil') of 'the lilies of the field', which 'toil not, neither do they spin' (*Matt.* vi. 28; cf. *Luke* xii. 27).

84. *Hateful is the dark blue sky, &c.*: the change to trochees seems to mark the sudden vigour of their indignation.

92. *parcels* 'parts', an archaic use

95. *the climbing wave*: i.e. high-reared; cf. 'the mounting wave' (l. 2).

103. *myrrh-bush*. probably a kind of acacia, the resin from which was used as incense, and for embalming the dead.

106. *crisping*: 'curling' in wavelets.

109. *melancholy*: not 'sadness', but the pensive and serious demeanour of which Fletcher wrote, 'Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy' Cf. Milton's *Il Penseroso*, whose happiness is quite as real as that of his *L' Allegro*.

113. *white dust, &c.*: the ashes of the dead, enclosed in a cinerary urn.

*brass*: see note to 'Oenone', l. 137. Funereal urns were sometimes made of χαλκός (e.g. *Soph. Electra* 758) For the whole subject see Sir T. Brown's *Hydriotaphia*.

120. *the island princes . . . substance*: as Penelope's suitors devoured the substance of Odysseus.



121 *the minstrel*. in the *Odyssey* (l. 154), Phemius is compelled against his will to sing for the suitors.

132 *the pilot-stars* the Greeks steered by the Great Bear, the Phoenicians by the Lesser Bear, hence the well-known lines (*Comus* 341)

And thou shalt be our star of Arcady [i.e. the Great Bear],  
Oι Tyrian Cynosure

133 *amaranth* the 'never-fading flower', ἀμάραντος, thus in 1 Peter v. 4 τὸν ἀμαράντινον τῆς δόξης στέφανον is translated 'the crown of glory that fadeth not away'. According to Pliny (xxi. 8), the flower may be preserved when plucked, and is made flesh by being sprinkled with water. The correct form 'amarant' is used by Milton (*P. L.* iii. 352), 'amaranth' is due to a confusion with ἄνθος, 'flower'.

*mōly*. μῶλυ, the fabulous plant given by Hermes to Odysseus, to counteract the enchantments of Circe. Its roots were black, but its flowers milk-white, and it was hard for mortals to dig (*Odyssey* x. 304). Later writers used the word for garlic.

142 *acanthus* 'bear's-foot' or 'blank-vine'. Its form is well known from its representation on Corinthian capitals—a style which is said to have occurred to the sculptor Callimachus through the accident of an acanthus growing out of a basket, and covering a tile which had been placed over it (*Vitruv.* iv. 1). There was also a tree of this name (see e.g. *Virg. Georg.* ii. 119).

146 *blooms*. 'blooms'.

148. *alley*: a path in a wood or garden, arched over with branches (e.g. the famous spruce-alley in the Forest of Dean).

150. *We have had enough*, &c.: see note to l. 84.

152. *Where the wallowing monster spouted*, &c.: the whale is Tennyson's addition to the monsters seen by Odysseus and his comrades.

153. *with an equal mind*: 'steadfastly'—not the sense of the Lat. *aequo animo*.

154. *hollow* 'low-lying'.

155. *like Gods*, &c. see note to 'Oenone', l. 129.

156. *nectar*: the drink of the gods.

*bolts*: thunderbolts, hurled by Zeus.

169 *Elysian*: according to Homer (*Od.* iv. 563), Elysium (Ἠλύσιον πεδίον) was not in the under-world, but at the west border of the Earth, near Ocean, here dwelt great heroes, who escaped death, under the rule of Rhadamanthus. It enjoyed the same serenity as Olympus.

170. *asphodel*: see note to 'Oenone', l. 95.

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## ULYSSES

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## ULYSSES

It little profits that an idle king,  
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.  
I cannot rest from travel. I will drink  
Life to the lees. all times I have enjoy'd  
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those  
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when  
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades 10  
Vext the dim sea I am become a name;  
For always roaming with a hungry heart  
Much have I seen and known, cities of men  
And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all,  
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,  
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.  
I am a part of all that I have met,  
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades 20  
For ever and for ever when I move.  
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
As tho' to breathe were life Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains: but every hour is saved  
From that eternal silence, something more,  
A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
And this grey spirit yearning in desire 30  
To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,  
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—  
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild  
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees  
 Subdue them to the useful and the good  
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
 Of common duties, decent not to fail 40  
 In offices of tenderness, and pay  
 Meet adoration to my household gods,  
 When I am gone He works his work, I mine  
 There lies the port the vessel puffs her sail  
 There gloom the dark broad seas My mariners,  
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with  
 me—

That ever with a frolic welcome took  
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed  
 Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old,  
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil, 50  
 Death closes all but something ere the end,  
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods  
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks  
 The long day wanes the slow moon climbs the deep  
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,  
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths 60  
 Of all the western stars, until I die.  
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down.  
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew  
 Tho' much is taken, much abides, and tho'  
 We are not now that strength which in old days  
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,  
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. 70

## NOTES

3 *mete*: measure out, allot It differs from 'dole' in that the latter contains the idea of a scanty distribution.

4 *Unequal laws*. in early times there were no laws of general application; each case was decided 'on its own merits'. This apparently equitable proceeding suffers from the twofold drawback, that the 'merits' of a case are very rarely wholly ascertainable, and that no one can tell what the law is till his own case comes to be decided. Hence with advancing civilization people began to see the necessity for 'equal laws', i.e. hard and fast rules to which all must conform. The gain in uniformity so obtained more than outweighs the occasional 'hard cases' which arise from it. As the lawyers say, 'hard cases make bad law'. It was one of the glories of Harmodius and Aristogiton that 'they slew the tyrant, and gave to Athens equal laws' (ισονόμους τ' Ἀθήνας ἐποιήσατ' ἐν, Scolia apud Athenaeum xv, p. 691).

*a savage race*. there is no hint in the *Odyssey* that the nobles of Ithaca were more barbarous than those in the rest of Greece, or than Ulysses himself.

10 *the rainy Hyades*: a translation of Virgil's *pluvias Hyades* (*Aeneid*, i 744), where *pluvias* is itself a translation of the Greek *Hyades* (Ύάδες). These were the seven stars in the head of Taurus which, when they rose with the sun, were thought to portend rain.

13. *Much have I seen, &c.* from *Odyssey*, i 3 πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, 'many were the men whose towns he saw, and whose minds he knew'.

17. *ringing*: resounding with the clash of battle.

*windy Troy*: this epithet for Troy (ἡνεμόεσσα) is a favourite one with Homer.

18 *I am a part, &c.* Tennyson was no doubt thinking of *Aeneid*, ii 5 'quaeque ipse miserrima vidi Et quorum pars magna fui', 'the deeds of woe mine eyes have beheld, and those whereof I was no small part' (Jackson).

19. *all experience is an arch, &c.*: i.e. all that we have done and

suffered is but the prelude to fresh experiences, which themselves in turn will pave the way for a still more distant future. There is no such thing as finality, each yesterday has made to-day, each to-day is making to-morrow.

26 *every hour is saved* : i.e. every hour we live is something saved

27. *something more* is an addition, a plus. I do not think it should be taken as merely equivalent to, 'and it is something more than that' [viz. a bringer of new experience]

29 *some three suns* : 'suns' is often used poetically for 'days', but this is the only passage, so far as I know, in which it is put for 'years'. Yet that must be its meaning here; Ulysses might have spoken of himself as having but three or four more years to live; he would hardly have planned his expedition had he only anticipated an equal number of days. Nemesianus, a little-known Latin poet who flourished about A. D. 288, uses *binos soles* for 'two years', and *ἥλιος* seems to have been used in post-Christian Greek in the same sense.

30 *And this grey spirit*, &c. : while all the time my old heart is longing, &c. In prose 'With' would be used for 'And'.

33. *Telemachus* : he was but an infant when Ulysses went to Troy, so naturally he did not recognize his father when the latter returned after an absence of twenty years. His position in Ithaca must have been one of great difficulty before his father's return, but he is always represented in the *Odyssey* as behaving with great prudence and spirit. Homer's standing epithet for him is *πεννυμένος* ('wise')

35 *discerning to fulfil* of sufficient discernment to fulfil. Cf. l. 40, 'decent not to fail'.

42 *my household gods* : the worship of household gods played a much greater part in the Roman religion than in the Greek. In Homer I doubt whether it is ever mentioned, all the sacrifices there being offered to the gods of Olympus. Virgil represents Aeneas as carrying *patrios Penates* with him in his escape from Troy (*Aeneid*, II. 717)

45. *My mariners* : Tennyson here departs from the tale told in the *Odyssey*; for there Odysseus is represented as landing alone in Ithaca, whither he was brought in a ship of the friendly Phaeacians, lamenting the loss of his dear companions, who had all perished on their homeward way through their own folly and their disobedience to the divine commands.

47. *a frolic welcome* : 'frolic', as an adjective, with the meaning 'joyous', 'merry', is less common than as a verb or a noun. Milton uses it in *L'Allegro*, 18, 'The frolic wind that breathes the spring'

53 *men that strove with Gods* the gods of Olympus took sides in the Trojan war, and on several occasions entered into the battles between the Greeks and the Trojans, wherein they were not always exempt from wounds

58 *sitting well in order, &c* Tennyson says that he took this from a line occurring more than once in the *Odyssey* (e g. iv 580).

ἔξῃς δ' ἐζόμενοι πολὺν ἄλα τύπτων ἑρემοῖς,

'and sitting in order they smote the grey sea with their oars'

62 *gulfs*. whirlpools or deeps of the sea

63 *the Happy Isles*: the Islands of the Blest (*μακάρων νῆσοι*) are first mentioned by Hesiod as the place to which heroes slain in battle and demigods retired to enjoy eternal rest. The later Greeks speak of the Islands as lying in the ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules. The Romans identified them with the Canary Islands, to which they gave the name *Fortunatae Insulae*

64 *Achilles*: the greatest warrior among all the Greeks who fought against Troy. The son of Peleus and the sea-nymph Thetis, he was offered the choice of a short and glorious life or a life long and undistinguished. Choosing the former he sailed with a great following to Troy, where he was long the bulwark of the Greeks, till he quarrelled with Agamemnon and angrily retired to his tent, refusing to take any further part in the war. Unmoved by the disasters of the Greeks, he persisted in nursing his wrath till roused by the death of his dearest friend Patroclus. Then, donning his armour, he rushed into battle, drove the Trojans in headlong flight, and slew Hector, their foremost champion. Shortly afterwards he was himself slain in the battle before the Scaean gate.





TENNYSON  
ODE ON THE DEATH  
OF THE  
DUKE OF WELLINGTON

EDITED, WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES, BY

C. B. WHEELER

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## ODE ON THE DEATH OF THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON

### I

BURY the Great Duke

With an empire's lamentation,  
Let us bury the Great Duke

To the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation,  
Mourning when their leaders fall,  
Warriors carry the warrior's pall,  
And sorrow darkens hamlet and hall.

### II

Where shall we lay the man whom we deplore  
Here, in streaming London's central roar  
Let the sound of those he wrought for, 10  
And the feet of those he fought for.  
Echo round his bones for evermore

### III

Lead out the pageant sad and slow,  
As fits an universal woe,  
Let the long long procession go,  
And let the sorrowing crowd about it grow,  
And let the mournful martial music blow,  
The last great Englishman is low.

### IV

Mourn, for to us he seems the last,  
Remembering all his greatness in the Past 20  
No more in soldier fashion will he greet  
With lifted hand the gazer in the street  
O friends, our chief state-oracle is mute.  
Mourn for the man of long-enduring blood,  
The statesman-warrior, moderate, resolute,  
Whole in himself, a common good.  
Mourn for the man of amplest influence,  
Yet clearest of ambitious crime,  
Our greatest yet with least pretence.  
Great in council and great in war, 30

Foremost captain of his time,  
 Rich in saving common-sense,  
 And, as the greatest only are,  
 In his simplicity sublime  
 O good grey head which all men knew,  
 O voice from which their omens all men drew,  
 O iron nerve to true occasion true,  
 O fall'n at length that tower of strength  
 Which stood four-square to all the winds that blew !  
 Such was he whom we deplore 40  
 The long self-sacrifice of life is o'er  
 The great World-victor's victor will be seen no more

## V

All is over and done  
 Render thanks to the Giver  
 England, for thy son  
 Let the bell be toll'd.  
 Render thanks to the Giver,  
 And render him to the mould  
 Under the cross of gold  
 That shines over city and river, 50  
 There he shall rest for ever  
 Among the wise and the bold  
 Let the bell be toll'd  
 And a reverent people behold  
 The towering car, the sable steeds :  
 Bright let it be with its blazon'd deeds,  
 Dark in its funeral fold.  
 Let the bell be toll'd  
 And a deeper knell in the heart be knoll'd ;  
 And the sound of the sorrowing anthem roll'd 60  
 Thro' the dome of the golden cross ,  
 And the volleying cannon thunder his loss ,  
 He knew their voices of old  
 For many a time in many a clime  
 His captain's-ear has heard them boom  
 Bellowing victory, bellowing doom  
 When he with those deep voices wrought,  
 Guarding realms and kings from shame ,  
 With those deep voices our dead captain taught  
 The tyrant, and asserts his claim 70

In that dread sound to the great name,  
 Which he has worn so pure of blame,  
 In praise and in dispraise the same,  
 A man of well-attemper'd frame  
 O civic muse, to such a name,  
 To such a name for ages long,  
 To such a name,  
 Preserve a broad approach of fame,  
 And ever-echoing avenues of song

## VI

Who is he that cometh, like an honour'd guest,      80  
 With banner and with music, with soldier and with  
 priest,

With a nation weeping, and breaking on my rest ?

Mighty Seaman, this is he

Was great by land as thou by sea

Thine island loves thee well, thou famous man,

The greatest sailor since our world began.

Now, to the roll of muffled drums,

To thee the greatest soldier comes ,

For this is he

Was great by land as thou by sea ,      90

His foes were thine , he kept us free ;

O give him welcome, this is he

Worthy of our gorgeous rites,

And worthy to be laid by thee ,

For this is England's greatest son,

He that gain'd a hundred fights,

Nor ever lost an English gun ,

This is he that far away

Against the myriads of Assaye

Clash'd with his fiery few and won ;      100

And underneath another sun,

Warring on a later day,

Round affrighted Lisbon drew

The treble works, the vast designs

Of his labour'd rampart-lines,

Where he greatly stood at bay,

Whence he issued forth anew,

And ever great and greater grew,

Beating from the wasted vines

Back to France her banded swarms, 110  
Back to France with countless blows,  
Till o'er the hills her eagles flew  
Beyond the Pyrenean pines,  
Follow'd up in valley and glen  
With blare of bugle, clamour of men,  
Roll of cannon and clash of arms,  
And England pouring on her foes  
Such a war had such a close  
Again their ravening eagle rose  
In anger, wheel'd on Europe-shadowing wings, 120  
And barking for the thrones of kings,  
Till one that sought but Duty's iron crown  
On that loud sabbath shook the spoiler down,  
A day of onsets of despair !  
Dash'd on every rocky square  
Their surging charges foam'd themselves away,  
Last, the Prussian trumpet blew,  
Thro' the long-tormented air  
Heaven flash'd a sudden jubilant ray,  
And down we swept and charged and overthrew. 130  
So great a soldier taught us there,  
What long-enduring hearts could do  
In that world's-earthquake, Waterloo !  
Mighty Seaman, tender and true,  
And pure as he from taint of craven guile,  
O saviour of the silver-coasted isle,  
O shaker of the Baltic and the Nile,  
If aught of things that here befall  
Touch a spirit among things divine,  
If love of country move thee there at all, 140  
Be glad, because his bones are laid by thine !  
And thro' the centuries let a people's voice  
In full acclaim,  
A people's voice,  
The proof and echo of all human fame,  
A people's voice, when they rejoice  
At civic revel and pomp and game,  
Attest their great commander's claim  
With honour, honour, honour, honour to him,  
Eternal honour to his name, 150

## VII

A people's voice ! we are a people yet.  
Tho' all men else their nobler dreams forget,  
Confused by brainless mobs and lawless Powers ,  
Thank Him who isled us here, and roughly set  
His Briton in blown seas and storming showers,  
We have a voice, with which to pay the debt  
Of boundless love and reverence and regret  
To those great men who fought, and kept it ours.  
And keep it ours, O God, from brute control ,  
O Statesmen, guard us, guard the eye, the soul 160  
Of Europe, keep our noble England whole,  
And save the one true seed of freedom sown  
Betwixt a people and their ancient throne,  
That sober freedom out of which there springs  
Our loyal passion for our temperate kings ,  
For, saving that, ye help to save mankind  
Till public wrong be crumbled into dust,  
And drill the raw world for the march of mind,  
Till crowds at length be sane and crowns be just  
But wink no more in slothful overtrust. 170  
Remember him who led your hosts ,  
He bad you guard the sacred coasts  
Your cannons moulder on the seaward wall ,  
His voice is silent in your council-hall  
For ever , and whatever tempests lour  
For ever silent , even if they broke  
In thunder, silent , yet remember all  
He spoke among you, and the Man who spoke ,  
Who never sold the truth to serve the hour,  
Nor palter'd with Eternal God for power , 180  
Who let the turbid streams of rumour flow  
Thro' either babbling world of high and low ,  
Whose life was work, whose language rife  
With rugged maxims hewn from life ,  
Who never spoke against a foe ,  
Whose eighty winters freeze with one rebuke  
All great self-seekers trampling on the right  
Truth-teller was our England's Alfred named  
Truth-lover was our English Duke ,  
Whatever record leap to light 190  
He never shall be shamed.



## VIII

Lo, the leader in these glorious wars  
 Now to glorious burial slowly borne,  
 Follow'd by the brave of other lands,  
 He, on whom from both her open hands  
 Lavish Honour shower'd all her stars,  
 And affluent Fortune emptied all her horn  
 Yea, let all good things await  
 Him who cares not to be great,  
 But as he saves or serves the state. 200  
 Not once or twice in our rough island-story,  
 The path of duty was the way to glory  
 He that walks it, only thirsting  
 For the right, and learns to deaden  
 Love of self, before his journey closes,  
 He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting  
 Into glossy purples which outredden  
 All voluptuous garden-roses  
 Not once or twice in our fair island-story,  
 The path of duty was the way to glory 210  
 He, that ever following her commands,  
 On with toil of heart and knees and hands,  
 Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won  
 His path upward, and prevail'd,  
 Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled  
 Are close upon the shining table-lands  
 To which our God Himself is moon and sun.  
 Such was he his work is done,  
 But while the races of mankind endure,  
 Let his great example stand 220  
 Colossal, seen of every land,  
 And keep the soldier firm, the statesman pure  
 Till in all lands and thro' all human story  
 The path of duty be the way to glory  
 And let the land whose hearths he saved from shame  
 For many and many an age proclaim  
 At civic revel and pomp and game,  
 And when the long-illumined cities flame,  
 Their ever-loyal iron leader's fame,  
 With honour, honour, honour, honour to him, 230  
 Eternal honour to his name.

## IX

Peace, his triumph will be sung  
 By some yet un moulded tongue  
 Far on in summers that we shall not see  
 Peace, it is a day of pain  
 For one about whose patriarchal knee  
 Late the little children clung  
 O peace, it is a day of pain  
 For one, upon whose hand and heart and brain  
 Once the weight and fate of Europe hung. 240  
 Ours the pain, be his the gain !  
 More than is of man's degree  
 Must be with us, watching here  
 At this, our great solemnity  
 Whom we see not we revere,  
 We revere, and we refrain ,  
 From talk of battles loud and vain,  
 And brawling memories all too free  
 For such a wise humility  
 As befits a solemn fane 250  
 We revere, and while we hear  
 The tides of Music's golden sea  
 Setting toward eternity,  
 Uplifted high in heart and hope are we,  
 Until we doubt not that for one so true  
 There must be other nobler work to do  
 Than when he fought at Waterloo,  
 And Victor he must ever be  
 For tho' the Giant Ages heave the hill  
 And break the shore, and evermore 260  
 Make and break, and work their will ,  
 Tho' world on world in myriad myriads roll  
 Round us, each with different powers,  
 And other forms of life than ours,  
 What know we greater than the soul ?  
 On God and Godlike men we build our trust  
 Hush, the Dead March wails in the people's ears  
 The dark crowd moves, and there are sobs and tears .  
 The black earth yawns the mortal disappears ;  
 Ashes to ashes, dust to dust , 270  
 He is gone who seem'd so great —  
 Gone ; but nothing can bereave him

Of the force he made his own  
Being here, and we believe him  
Something far advanced in State.  
And that he wears a truer crown  
Than any wreath that man can weave him.  
Speak no more of his renown,  
Lay your earthly fancies down,  
And in the vast cathedral leave him  
God accept him, Christ receive him

## NOTES

6 *fun* : the cloth, usually of black, purple, or white velvet, which is spread over the coffin, is often in public funerals carried by persons of distinction as a mark of respect. At the funeral of Sir Roger de Coverley, Addison says, 'The coffin was carried by six of the tenants, and the pall held up by six of the Quorum' i.e. the county magistrates (*Spectator*, October 23, 1712).

9. *Here* : i.e. in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral. The monument to the Duke is above, under one of the arches of the nave.

14. *an universal woe* : as 'universe' begins with a consonantal sound, modern usage prefers to precede it by 'a' rather than 'an'. But this exclusion of the 'n' has been a very gradual process; the Authorized Version of 1611 has 'an house', and Dr. Johnson, a century and a half later, wrote 'an yearly pension'. Cf. the modern 'such a one' with the earlier 'such an one'.

23. *our chief state-oracle* : Wellington was undoubtedly a great man, he was also, what is perhaps equally rare, an entirely honest one; but probably no one but a Poet Laureate writing a Funeral Ode would have eulogized his statesmanship. 'He was hardly anything of a statesman, he knew little and cared less about what may be called statecraft; and as an administrator he had made many mistakes' (McCarthy's *Short History of our own Times*). Moreover, for the last six years of his life the Duke had retired from public life.

32. *Rick in saving common-sense* : though 'stiff in opinion' and often incapable of gauging the feeling of the nation, the Duke knew how to yield when occasion required. Thus in 1828 he advised the House of Lords not to oppose the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, in the following year he renounced his opposition to Catholic Emancipation and himself introduced the Bill, and in 1832, after his opposition to Reform had led to his being hooted in the streets and caused him to protect his windows with iron shutters, seeing that Lord Grey was determined to carry his Bill, he advised the peers to abandon a useless struggle.

39. *four-square* : i.e. fronting the gale from whichever quarter it blew.

42. *The great World-victor* was, of course, Napoleon, who between 1796 and 1813 had defeated all the Powers of Europe with the exception of Great Britain.

49. *the cross of gold*. the dome of St Paul's Cathedral is surmounted by a ball and a gilded cross, the top of which is 355 ft 6 in. above the Cathedral floor (see the *Guardian* for March 19, 1915). The floor is several feet above the adjoining streets, so that the popular belief that the top of the cross is 404 ft. 'high' is probably not far out.

55 *The towering car*: this, probably the most imposing hearse that this country has ever seen, was made of cannon captured from the French and cost £13,000 to construct. The names of Wellington's victories were inscribed on it in gold letters, and over it was spread the black funeral pall. The car is still to be seen in the crypt of the Cathedral.

59 *knoll'd*. to knoll is a later form of the verb to knell, meaning to ring or toll. It is most commonly found with the substantive 'knell', as in *Macbeth*, v. viii. 50, 'And so his knell is knoll'd'. It is still generally used, with the spelling 'knowl', in Lincolnshire dialect, which may account for Tennyson's use of it; but in literature it is an archaism.

74 *of well-attemper'd frame* i.e. capable of enduring extremes of heat and cold. His biographers say that his powers of endurance, both mental and physical, were extraordinary.

75. *civic muse*: the Muse which presides over the arts of the City of London.

80-2. These three lines are supposed to be spoken by Nelson, whose tomb is in the crypt of St Paul's near that of Wellington. The rest of the stanza is the poet's reply. The great General and the great Admiral had met but once before: that was by chance at the Colonial Office in September 1805, when Sir Arthur Wellesley happened to be calling at the same time as Nelson, a few days before the latter left England for the last time.

87. *muffled drums*: on mournful occasions the drums are wrapped in black cloth to deaden the sound.

96. *gav'd a hundred fights*: cf. what was said of Marlborough, that he never fought a battle which he did not win, or besieged a town which he did not take.

97. *Nor ever lost an English gun*: this is no poetic exaggeration, but an historic fact.

99. *Assaye*: in 1803 Major-General Wellesley was directed by his brother Lord Mornington (afterwards Marquess of Wellesley), the Governor-General of India, to put down a rising in the Mahratta territory. With a force of about 5,000 men he fell on

the Mahratta army, which numbered over 30,000, at Assaye, a village in the north-west of Haidarabad, on September 23, and after a severe struggle gained a complete victory, capturing over a hundred guns. 'In comparison with the battle of Assaye all fighting that had hitherto taken place in India was child's play.' Wellesley followed up this victory, for which he was knighted, by a second, two months later, at Argaum in Berar, and compelled the Mahrattas to sue for peace and cede a quantity of valuable territory.

104. *The treble works* in 1809 Wellesley, now Viscount Wellington, foreseeing that Napoleon would make a strong effort in the Peninsula, constructed three lines of elaborate fortifications to the north of Lisbon, between the Tagus and the sea. The most northerly ran from the ocean, over the heights of Torres Vedras (after which the lines were commonly called) to Alhandra on the Tagus. The second line was from six to ten miles south of the first and about fifteen miles from Lisbon; the third was in the immediate neighbourhood of the city. The lines were protected by about a hundred forts mounting upwards of six hundred guns. In October 1810 Wellington retired within these lines, pursued by Masséna; but the French general found the first line impregnable, and after viewing it with despair for a month, was compelled by want of supplies to retire. Wellington followed him, but his forces were too weak to risk an engagement, and it was not till the summer of 1813 that the French were driven across the Pyrenees.

112. *her eagles*: when Napoleon became emperor he adopted the eagle as the badge of the French army.

118. *had such a close* the retreat from Spain, coming on the top of Napoleon's disastrous Moscow expedition in 1812, was the beginning of the end. The Allies entered Paris at the end of March 1814, and on April 4 Napoleon abdicated and was banished to the island of Elba. On March 20 of the following year, having escaped from Elba, he re-entered Paris and began his second period of empire, the famous 'hundred days', which ended happily for the peace of Europe on Sunday, June 18, on the field of Waterloo.

121. *barking*: this is a curious word to use of an eagle.

127. *Last, the Prussian trumpet blew*: on June 15 Napoleon had driven back the Prussians under Blücher at Ligny, so that they did not appear on the field of Waterloo till 5 in the afternoon of the great day.

129. *Heaven flash'd a sudden jubilant ray*: it was past eight o'clock before the Duke gave his troops the word for the final charge. 'As they joyously sprang forward against the discomfited masses of the French, the setting sun broke through the clouds which had obscured the sky during the greater part of

the day, and glittered on the bayonets of the Allies, while they poured down into the valley and towards the heights that were held by the foe'—Creasy

137. *shaker of the Baltic and the Nile*: on August 1, 1798, Nelson discovered the French men-of-war which had convoyed Napoleon's troops to Egypt, lying in Aboukir Bay, between Alexandria and the Rosetta mouth of the Nile. Though they were close to the shore, Nelson contrived to send a part of his fleet between the French ships and the land, so as to place the enemy between two fires. The battle began at 6 o'clock in the evening and lasted all through the night and part of the following day; by which time thirteen out of the seventeen French ships had been either taken or destroyed. For this exploit Nelson was raised to the peerage. The battle is more correctly known as the battle of Aboukir Bay, though it is popularly called the battle of the Nile.

The battle of the Baltic arose out of the machinations of a northern league between Russia, Sweden, and Denmark, which had been established to protest against the British right of search. Early in 1801 Denmark had seized Hamburg and laid an embargo on British property; so an English fleet was sent into the Baltic under Sir Hyde Parker, Nelson being his second in command. After passing through the Sound he English attacked the Danish fleet on the morning of April 2; by half-past three all the Danish ships had struck, but they could not be carried off owing to the batteries on shore. Nelson then sent a note 'to the brothers of Englishmen, the Danes', and succeeded in securing an armistice, which ultimately resulted in a treaty between England and the northern Powers.

152. *Tho' all men else their nobler dreams forget*: in 1848, four years before this Ode was written, France entered on another revolutionary period, which lasted till Louis Napoleon became Emperor in December 1852. During these five years of riot, confusion, and disorder, the friends of France may well have wondered if she would ever regain her sanity. The revolutionary spirit then prevalent found an echo throughout Europe, and, despite Tennyson's boast, the United Kingdom was not wholly free from disturbance.

158. *it* referring to 'island', understood from 'isled'.

160. *the eye, the soul of Europe*: the eye is not considered here as the organ of vision, the means whereby Europe saw and judged of events, but as the seat of intelligence and light; so an old writer spoke in 1680 of the two Universities as being the two eyes of England. Soul is used in the sense of 'chief agent', 'leading spirit'. To-day, when patriotism is held to consist rather in serving one's country than in glorifying her at the expense of all others, it may be thought that these expressions would

'carry more weight if they came from a foreigner. But the poet is on surer ground when he speaks of Britain as possessing the 'one true seed of freedom', for in none of the other Great Powers of Europe was there any check upon the Crown comparable to our Magna Charta or the Bill of Rights

166 *saving that* : i.e. by saving 'the seed of freedom' (l. 162).

170. In the first edition this was followed by.

Perchance our greatness will increase ;  
Perchance a darkening future yields  
Some reverse from worse to worse,  
The blood of men in quiet fields,  
And sprinkled on the sheaves of peace

The gloomy forecast in the last four lines, prompted by the unrest then prevalent in Europe, proving unduly pessimistic, the lines were afterwards omitted

172 *guard the sacred coasts* : in 1839 and again in 1843 and 1844 the Duke drew the attention of the Government to the need of a more adequate system of defence against invasion

180. *galled* : haggled, bargained

181. *rugged maxims* : the Duke's language was always terse and emphatic, and often garnished with expressions of greater strength than is customary among educated people to-day

186 *eighty winters* : Wellington was in his eighty-fourth year when he died

188. *our England's Alfred* : in the *Life of Alfred the Great* written by Asser, Bishop of Sherborne (d. 909), the king is called *Ælfredus veridicus* ('Ælfred the Truth-teller'). Freeman says, indeed, that he is 'the most perfect character in history. . . . In no other man on record were so many virtues disfigured by so little alloy'

190. *Whatever record leap to light* : 'unlike Napoleon's dispatches and correspondence, everything from Wellington's pen is absolutely trustworthy : not a word is written for effect, and no fact is misrepresented.'—Fyffe.

207 *outeddden* : this verb appears in Herrick's 'Weeping Cherry' (1648), 'Because my Julia's lip . . . did out-red the same'.

217. *God Himself is moon and sun* : cf. Revelation xxi, 23, 'And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did lighten it'.

229. *Their . . . iron leader's fame* : a common nickname for Wellington was the Iron Duke.

236. *about whose patriarchal knee, &c.* : by his younger son



Charles Wellington had six grandchildren, one of whom is the present (the fourth) Duke

242. *More than is of man's degree*: something higher than humanity, i.e. the souls of the departed.

253 *Setting toward eternity*: i.e. the stream of music carries the minds of the hearers away from the transient things of life. To set is used of a tide, a current, or a wind, in the sense of having a certain direction Cf. Matthew Arnold, *Sohrab and Rustum*, 627, 'As the vast tide . . . sets to shore At the full moon'.

265 *What know we greater than the soul?* this is an echo of Kepler's famous saying, 'In the Universe there is nothing great but man, in man there is nothing great but mind'.

270 *Ashes to ashes, &c.* from the Burial Service, when the earth is 'cast upon the body by some standing by'.

# TENNYSON

THE COMING OF ARTHUR  
THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

C. B. WHEELER, M.A.

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## INTRODUCTION

THE source from which Tennyson derived the material for *The Coming of Arthur* and *The Passing of Arthur* was in the first instance a book printed by Caxton in 1485, entitled *La Morte d'Arthur*, which was translated from 'certain French books' by Sir Thomas Malory. The translator, who cannot be definitely identified, tells us that he completed his book in the ninth year of King Edward the Fourth, but beyond referring several times to the 'Frensshe booke' he gives no clue to the original of his work. Subsequent research, however, has shown that, so far as these two poems are concerned, he drew mainly on (1) a French poem, the *Romance of Merlin* written by Robert de Borron, who with his brother was commissioned by Henry II of England to write the traditional legends of the Round Table; (2) an English metrical romance *La Morte d'Arthure*, an MS. of which is in Lincoln Cathedral Library; and (3) a French *Romance of Lancelot*.

Of Malory's first edition there is but one perfect copy now extant, and that is in the U.S.A.; it has been reprinted by Dr. H. O. Sommer with two monumental volumes of critical apparatus (1889-91).

Tennyson was not the only poet to be inspired by Malory. William Morris's 'Defence of Guenevere', Swinburne's 'Tristram of Lyonesse', and Matthew Arnold's 'Death of Tristram' are all founded on the *Morte d'Arthur*.

Earlier even than de Borron, Geoffrey of Monmouth, who lived in the early part of the twelfth century, treated of King Arthur in Books viii–xi of his *History of the Britons* (1147); he professed to have drawn his materials from Brittany, but, whatever their source, they cannot be regarded as any foundation for history.

Part of *The Passing of Arthur* (ll. 146–416) was published in 1842 as *Morte d'Arthur*, but the poem was not completed till 1869, when the ninth edition of *Idylls of the King* appeared, containing *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, and *The Passing of Arthur*, in addition to the four *Idylls* which had appeared in the first edition (1859). Four others were added in 1889, so the complete edition comprises twelve *Idylls* altogether.

## THE COMING OF ARTHUR

[First published Dec. 1869.]

LEODOGRAN, the King of Cameliard,  
Had one fair daughter, and none other child ;  
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,  
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came  
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war  
Each upon other, wasted all the land ;  
And still from time to time the heathen host  
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.  
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness, 10  
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,  
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.  
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,  
And after him King Uther fought and died,  
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.  
And after these King Arthur for a space,  
And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,  
Drew all their petty pryncedoms under him,  
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reign'd.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste, 20  
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,  
And none or few to scare or chase the beast ;  
So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear  
Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,  
And wallow'd in the gardens of the king.  
And ever and anon the wolf would steal  
The children and devour, but now and then,  
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat  
To human sucklings ; and the children, housed  
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl, 30  
And mock their foster-mother on four feet,  
Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,  
Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran  
Groan'd for the Roman legions here again,

And Cæsar's eagle : then his brother king,  
Rience, assail'd him : last a heathen horde,  
Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,  
And on the spike that split the mother's heart  
Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,  
He knew not whither he should turn for aid. 40

But—for he heard of Arthur newly crown'd,  
Tho' not without an uproar made by those  
Who cried, 'He is not Uther's son'—the king  
Sent to him, saying, 'Arise, and help us thou!  
For here between the man and beast we die.'

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,  
But heard the call, and came : and Guinevere  
Stood by the castle wall to watch him pass ;  
But since he neither wore on helm or shield  
The golden symbol of his kinghood, 50  
But rode a simple knight among his knights,  
And many of these in richer arms than he,  
She saw him not, or mark'd not, if she saw,  
One among many, tho' his face was bare.  
But Arthur, looking downward as he past,  
Felt the light of her eyes into his life  
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitch'd  
His tents beside the forest. And he drave  
The heathen, and he slew the beast, and fell'd  
The forest, and let in the sun, and made 60  
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight ;  
And so return'd.

For while he linger'd there,  
A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts  
Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm  
Flash'd forth and into war : for most of these  
Made head against him, crying, 'Who is he  
That he should rule us ? who hath proven him  
King Uther's son ? for lo ! we look at him,  
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,  
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew. 70  
This is the son of Gorlois, not the king ;  
This is the son of Anton, not the king.'

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt  
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,  
Desiring to be join'd with Guinevere;  
And thinking as he rode, 'Her father said  
That there between the man and beast they die.  
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts  
Up to my throne, and side by side with me?  
What happiness to reign a lonely king, 80  
Vext—O ye stars that shudder over me,  
O earth that soundest hollow under me,  
Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be join'd  
To her that is the fairest under heaven,  
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
And cannot will my will, nor work my work  
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm  
Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,  
Then might we live together as one life,  
And reigning with one will in everything 90  
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,  
And power on this dead world to make it live.'

And Arthur from the field of battle sent  
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,  
His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,  
Saying, 'If I in aught have served thee well,  
Gave me thy daughter Guinevere to wife.'

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart  
Debating—'How should I that am a king,  
However much he help me at my need, 100  
Give my one daughter saving to a king,  
And a king's son?'—lifted his voice, and call'd  
A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom  
He trusted all things, and of him required  
His counsel: 'Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?'

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,  
'Sir king, there be but two old men that know:  
And each is twice as old as I; and one  
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served  
King Uther thro' his magic art; and one 110  
Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys,  
Who taught him magic; but the scholar ran



Before the master, and so far, that Bleys  
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote  
All things and whatsoever Merlin did  
In one great annal-book, where after-years  
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth.'

To whom the King Leodogran replied,  
'O friend, had I been holpen half as well  
By this King Arthur as by thee to-day, 120  
Then beast and man had had their share of me :  
But summon here before us yet once more  
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere.'

Then, when they came before him, the king said,  
'I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,  
And reason in the chase : but wherefore now  
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,  
Some calling Arthur born of Gorlois,  
Others of Anton ? Tell me, ye yourselves,  
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son ?' 130

And Ulfius and Brastias answer'd, 'Ay.'  
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights  
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake—  
For bold in heart and act and word was he,  
Whenever slander breathed against the king—

'Sir, there be many rumours on this head :  
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,  
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,  
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man .  
And there be those who deem him more than man, 140  
And dream he dropt from heaven : but my belief  
In all this matter—so ye care to learn—  
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time  
The prince and warrior Gorlois, he that held  
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,  
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne :  
And daughters had she borne him,—one whereof  
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,  
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved,  
To Arthur,—but a son she had not borne. 150  
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love :

But she, a stainless wife to Gorlois,  
So loathed the bright dishonour of his love,  
That Gorlois and King Uther went to war :  
And overthrown was Gorlois and slain.  
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged  
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,  
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,  
Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in,  
And there was none to call to but himself. 160  
So, compass'd by the power of the king,  
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,  
And with a shameful swiftness : afterward,  
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,  
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule  
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.  
And that same night, the night of the new year,  
By reason of the bitterness and grief  
That vext his mother, all before his time  
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born 170  
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate  
To Merlin, to be holden far apart  
Until his hour should come ; because the lords  
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,  
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child  
Piecemeal among them, had they known ; for each  
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,  
And many hated Uther for the sake  
Of Gorlois. Wherefore Merlin took the child,  
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight 180  
And ancient friend of Uther ; and his wife  
Nursed the young prince, and rear'd him with her own ;  
And no man knew. And ever since the lords  
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,  
So that the realm has gone to wrack. but now,  
This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)  
Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,  
Proclaiming, " Here is Uther's heir, your king,"  
A hundred voices cried, " Away with him !  
No king of ours ! a son of Gorlois he, 190  
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,  
Or else baseborn." Yet Merlin thro' his craft,  
And while the people clamour'd for a king,

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Had Arthur crown'd; but after, the great lords  
Banded, and so brake out in open war.'

Then while the king debated with himself  
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,  
Or born the son of Gorlois, after death,  
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,  
Or whether there were truth in anything 200  
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,  
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,  
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;  
Whom as he could, not as he would, the king  
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,

'A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas—  
Ye come from Arthur's court: think ye this king—  
So few his knights, however brave they be—  
Hath body enow to beat his foemen down?'

'O King,' she cried, 'and I will tell thee · few, 210  
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;  
For I was near him when the savage yells  
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat  
Crown'd on the dais, and his warriors cried,  
"Be thou the king, and we will work thy will  
Who love thee." Then the king in low deep tones,  
And simple words of great authority,  
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,  
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some  
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost, 220  
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes  
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

'But when he spake and cheer'd his Table Round  
With large divine and comfortable words  
Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld  
From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash  
A momentary likeness of the king:  
And ere it left their faces, thro' the cross  
And those around it and the Crucified,  
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote 230  
Flame-colour, vert and azure, in three rays,  
One falling upon each of three fair queens,

Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends  
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright  
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

‘And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit  
And hundred winters are but as the hands  
Of loyal vassals toiling for their hege.

‘And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,  
Who knows a subtler magic than his own— 240  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.  
She gave the king his huge cross-hilted sword,  
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist  
Of incense curl’d about her, and her face  
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;  
But there was heard among the holy hymns  
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells  
Down in a deep, calm, whatsoever storms  
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,  
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord. 250

‘There likewise I beheld Excalbur  
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword  
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,  
And Arthur row’d across and took it—rich  
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,  
Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright  
That men are blinded by it—on one side,  
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,  
“Take me,” but turn the blade and you shall see,  
And written in the speech ye speak yourself, 260  
“Cast me away!” And sad was Arthur’s face  
Taking it, but old Merlin counsell’d him,  
“Take thou and strike! the time to cast away  
Is yet far-off.” So this great brand the king  
Took, and by this will beat his foemen down.’

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought  
To sift his doubtings to the last, and ask’d,  
Fixing full eyes of question on her face,  
‘The swallow and the swift are near akin,  
But thou art closer to this noble prince, 270  
Being his own dear sister;’ and she said,

‘Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne am I;’  
‘And therefore Arthur’s sister,’ ask’d the King.  
She answer’d, ‘These be secret things,’ and sign’d  
To those two sons to pass and let them be.  
And Gawain went, and breaking into song  
Sprang out, and follow’d by his flying hair  
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw :  
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,  
And there half heard ; the same that afterward 280  
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer, ‘What know I ?  
For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,  
And dark in hair and eyes am I ; and dark  
Was Gorlois, yea and dark was Uther too,  
Wellnigh to blackness ; but this king is fair  
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.  
Moreover always in my mind I hear  
A cry from out the dawning of my life,  
A mother weeping, and I hear her say, 290  
“O that ye had some brother, pretty one,  
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.”’

‘Ay,’ said the King, ‘and hear ye such a cry ?  
But when did Arthur chance upon thee first ?’

‘O King !’ she cried, ‘and I will tell thee true :  
He found me first when yet a little maid :  
Beaten I had been for a little fault  
Whereof I was not guilty ; and out I ran  
And flung myself down on a bank of heath,  
And hated this fair world and all therein, 300  
And wept, and wish’d that I were dead ; and he—  
I know not whether of himself he came,  
Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk  
Unseen at pleasure—he was at my side,  
And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,  
And dried my tears, being a child with me.  
And many a time he came, and evermore  
As I grew greater grew with me ; and sad  
At times he seem’d, and sad with him was I,  
Stern too at times, and then I loved him not, 310

But sweet again, and then I loved him well.  
And now of late I see him less and less,  
But those first days had golden hours for me,  
For then I surely thought he would be king.

'But let me tell thee now another tale :  
 For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,  
 Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,  
 To hear him speak before he left his life.  
 Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage,  
 And when I enter'd told me that himself 320  
 And Merlin ever served about the king,  
 Uther, before he died, and on the night  
 When Uther in Tintagil past away  
 Moaning and waiting for an heir, the two  
 Left the still king, and passing forth to breathe,  
 Then from the castle gateway by the chasm  
 Descending thro' the dismal night—a night  
 In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost—  
 Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps  
 It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof 330  
 A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern  
 Bright with a shining people on the decks,  
 And gone as soon as seen. And then the two  
 Dropt to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,  
 Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,  
 Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep  
 And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged  
 Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame :  
 And down the wave and in the flame was borne  
 A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet, 340  
 Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried "The King !  
 Here is an heir for Uther !" And the fringe  
 Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,  
 Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,  
 And all at once all round him rose in fire,  
 So that the child and he were clothed in fire.  
 And presently thereafter follow'd calm,  
 Free sky and stars : "And this same child," he said,  
 "Is he who reigns ; nor could I part in peace  
 Till this were told." And saying this the seer 350  
 Went thro' the strait and dreadful pass of death,

Not ever to be question'd any more  
 Save on the further side ; but when I met  
 Merlin, and ask'd him if these things were truth—  
 The shining dragon and the naked child  
 Descending in the glory of the seas—  
 He laugh'd as is his wont, and answer'd me  
 In riddling triplets of old time, and said :

“ Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow in the sky !  
 A young man will be wiser by and by ; 360  
 An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow on the lea !  
 And truth is this to me, and that to thee ;  
 And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, sun, and rain ! and the free blossom blows :  
 Sun, rain, and sun ! and where is he who knows ?  
 From the great deep to the great deep he goes.”

‘ So Merlin riddling anger'd me ; but thou  
 Fear not to give this king thine only child,  
 Guinevere : so great bards of him will sing 370  
 Hereafter ; and dark sayings from of old  
 Ranging and ringing thro' the minds of men,  
 And echo'd by old folk beside their fires  
 For comfort after their wage-work is done,  
 Speak of the king ; and Merlin in our time  
 Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn  
 Tho' men may wound him that he will not die,  
 But pass, again to come ; and then or now  
 Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,  
 Till these and all men hail him for their king.’ 380

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,  
 But musing ‘ Shall I answer yea or nay ? ’  
 Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,  
 Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,  
 Field after field, up to a height, the peak  
 Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,  
 Now looming, and now lost ; and on the slope  
 The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,  
 Fire glimpsed ; and all the land from roof and rick,  
 In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind, 390  
 Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze

And made it thicker ; while the phantom king  
Sent out at times a voice ; and here or there  
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest  
Slew on and burnt, crying, ' No king of ours,  
No son of Uther, and no king of ours ' ;  
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze  
Descended, and the solid earth became  
As nothing, and the king stood out in heaven,  
Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke, and sent 400  
Ulfius, and Brastias and Bedivere,  
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved  
And honour'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth  
And bring the Queen ;—and watch'd him from the gates :  
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,  
(For then was latter April) and return'd  
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.  
To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,  
Chief of the church in Britain, and before 410  
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the king  
That morn was married, while in stanness white,  
The fair beginners of a nobler time,  
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights  
Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.  
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake,  
' Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world  
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,  
And all this Order of thy Table Round  
Fulfil the boundless purpose of their king.' 420

Then at the marriage feast came in from Rome,  
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,  
Great lords, who claim'd the tribute as of yore.  
But Arthur spake, ' Behold, for these have sworn  
To fight my wars, and worship me their king ;  
The old order changeth, yielding place to new ;  
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,  
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old  
,To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,  
No tribute will we pay : ' so those great lords 430  
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.



And Arthur and his knighthood for a space  
Were all one will, and thro' that strength the king  
Drew in the petty pryncedoms under him,  
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame  
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign'd.

## THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

[First published Dec., 1869.]

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,  
First made and latest left of all the knights,  
Told, when the man was no more than a voice  
In the white winter of his age, to those  
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

Before that last weird battle in the west  
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd  
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown  
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear  
Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight! 10  
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.  
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.  
And I am blown along a wandering wind,  
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'  
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change  
Their season in the night and wail their way  
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream  
Shrill'd; but in going mungled with dim cries  
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,  
As of some lonely city sack'd by night, 20  
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail  
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd,  
'Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,  
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries  
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild  
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?'

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:  
O me, my King, let pass whatever will,  
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;  
But in their stead thy name and glory cling 30  
To all high places like a golden cloud  
For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.  
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death  
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;

And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—  
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,  
And with him many of thy people, and knights  
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown  
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.  
Right well in heart they know thee for the King. 40  
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
'Far other is this battle in the west  
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,  
And thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,  
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine  
To war against my people and my knights.  
The king who fights his people fights himself.  
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke  
That strikes them dead is as my death to me. 50  
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way  
Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw  
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,  
Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,  
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,  
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse—  
A land of old upheaven from the abyss  
By fire, to sink into the abyss again ; 60  
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,  
And the long mountains ended in a coast  
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away  
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.  
There the pursuer could pursue no more,  
And he that fled no further fly the King ;  
And there, that day when the great light of heaven  
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,  
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.  
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight  
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west. 70  
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea :  
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew  
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold  
With formless fear ; and ev'n on Arthur fell

Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought,  
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,  
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew ;  
And some had visions out of golden youth,  
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts  
Look in upon the battle ; and in the mist 80  
Was many a noble deed, many a base,  
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,  
And ever and anon with host to host  
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,  
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash  
Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks  
After the Christ, of those who falling down  
Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist ;  
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,  
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies, 90  
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs  
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,  
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail  
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death  
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,  
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,  
A dead hush fell ; but when the dolorous day  
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came  
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew 100  
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide  
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field  
Of battle : but no man was moving there ;  
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,  
Nor yet of heathen ; only the wan wave  
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro  
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down  
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,  
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,  
And rolling far along the gloomy shores 110  
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,  
And whiter than the mist that all day long  
Had held the field of battle was the King :

'Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,  
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,  
And beats upon the faces of the dead,  
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me?—  
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n  
Confusion, till I know not what I am, 120  
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.  
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: 'My King,  
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,  
There also will I worship thee as King.  
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live  
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought  
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,  
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.' 129

Then spake the King: 'My house hath been my doom.  
But call not thou this traitor of my house  
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.  
My house are rather they who swear my vows,  
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.  
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,  
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,  
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.  
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;  
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see  
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King 140  
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege  
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword  
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,  
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,  
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd  
Among the mountains by the winter sea;  
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,  
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their lord,  
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep, 150  
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
A broken chancel with a broken cross,

That stood on a dark strait of barren land :  
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon, was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
‘The sequel of to-day unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep      160  
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we  
Shall never more, at any future time,  
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
Walking about the gardens and the halls  
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.  
I perish by this people which I made,—  
Tho’ Merlin sware that I should come again  
To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,  
I am so deeply smitten thro’ the helm  
That without help I cannot last till morn.      170  
Thou therefore take my brand Excalbur,  
Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how  
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm  
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
Holding the sword—and how I row’d across  
And took it, and have worn it, like a king :  
And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
In aftertime, this also shall be known :  
But now delay not : take Excalibur,      180  
And fling him far into the middle mere :  
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.’

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :  
It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,  
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro’ the helm—  
A little thing may harm a wounded man ;  
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.’

So saying, from the ruin’d shrine he stept,  
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,      190  
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang

Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down  
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,  
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks, 200  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd  
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd  
There in the many-knotted waterflags,  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere : 210  
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave ?  
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :  
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,  
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd  
Thy fæalty, nor like a noble knight :  
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand, 220  
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.  
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,  
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;  
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote 230  
His palms together, and he cried aloud :

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,  
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.  
What good should follow this, if this were done ?  
What harm, undone ? Deep harm to disobey,  
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.  
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand  
An act unprofitable, against himself ? 240  
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
What record, or what relic of my lord,  
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
And rumours of a doubt ? But were this kept,  
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,  
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,  
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.  
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps  
Upon the hidden bases of the hills." 250  
So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
To all the people, winning reverence.  
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,  
And hid Excalibur the second time,  
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :  
'What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
'I heard the water lapping on the crag, 260  
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :  
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !  
Authority forgets a dying king,  
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye  
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,  
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
In whom should meet the offices of all,



Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ; 270  
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :  
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,  
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon, 281  
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the northern sea.  
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur :  
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere. 290  
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :  
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen ?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems  
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,  
So great a miracle as yonder hilt. 300  
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;  
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard :  
'My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.

Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear  
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.' 310

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,  
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,  
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere  
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,  
And would have spoken, but he found not words;  
Then took with care; and kneeling on one knee,  
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard, 320  
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,  
Muttering and murmuring at his ear 'Quick, quick!  
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'  
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.  
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves 330  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—  
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
Beneath them; and descending they were ware  
That all the decks were dense with stately forms, 340  
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these  
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose  
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
And, as it were one voice, an agony  
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge ;'  
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens  
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.  
But she, that rose the tallest of them all 351  
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands  
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,  
And dropping bitter tears against his brow  
Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white  
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon  
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;  
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops  
Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls— 360  
That made his forehead like a rising sun  
High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust ;  
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
So like a shatter'd column lay the King ;  
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged  
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere : 370  
' Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?  
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?  
For now I see the true old times are dead,  
When every morning brought a noble chance,  
And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
Such times have been not since the light that led  
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
Which was an image of the mighty world ;  
And I, the last, go forth companionless, 380  
And the days darken round me, and the years,  
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge :  
' The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?

I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May He within Himself make pure ! but thou,  
If thou shouldst never see my face again, 390  
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
But now farewell. I am going a long way 400  
With these thou seest—if indeed I go  
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—  
To the island-valley of Avilion ;  
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies  
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns  
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, 411  
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
Revolving many memories, till the hull  
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
And on the mere the wailing died away.

At length he groan'd, and turning slowly clomb  
The last hard footstep of that iron crag ;  
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,  
' He passes to be King among the dead, 420  
And after healing of his grievous wound  
He comes again ; but—if he come no more—  
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,  
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed  
On that high day, when, clothed with living light  
They stood before his throne in silence, friends  
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ?'

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint  
As fróm beyond the limit of the world,  
Like the last echo born of a great cry, 430  
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice  
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb  
E'en to the highest he could climb, and saw,  
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,  
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,  
Down that long water opening on the deep  
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go  
From less to less and vanish into light.  
And the new sun rose bringing the new year. 440

## NOTES

### THE COMING OF ARTHUR

1. *Leodogran* is unknown to history; but he appears in the *Merlin Romance*, as the king of Carmelide on whose borders was a town called Breckenho—which suggests Brecknock, otherwise Brecon.

4. *Gumevere*: Geoffrey of Monmouth says the name of Arthur's wife was Guanhamara, she was 'descended from a noble family of Romans and educated under Duke Cadur' of Cornwall.

7. *Each upon other*: this, the strictly grammatical form, has been superseded in modern prose by the curious inversion 'upon each other'.

8. *the heathen host*: this heathen invasion is about the only event which enables us to give even an approximate date to Arthur. When Constantine in A.D. 312 adopted Christianity, Britain, then under Roman rule, accepted the imperial religion and thenceforward was deemed a Christian country. In 410 the Romans were forced to abandon Britain, being themselves pressed by the barbarians nearer home, and the country became the prey of the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, heathen tribes from the northern parts of Germany. The first inroad took place according to the early chroniclers in 449, when Hengist and Horsa—whose real existence is at least doubtful—landed at Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet. Thence onwards to 577 ensued a long struggle between the Christian British and the heathen invaders, to end, so far as the bulk of the country was concerned, in the great Saxon victories of Deorham near Bath, and Chester Arthur, then, must have reigned somewhere between 449 and 577, and though the ancient chroniclers, with a praiseworthy desire to be definite, have given the date of his reign as 501-42, this is at best but a guess, and rests only on probability.

13. *Aurelius*: this legendary personage, who was termed Aurelius Ambrosius, is said to have reigned 481. Geoffrey makes him the second son of Constantine, who fled to 'lesser Britain' (i.e. Brittany) during the usurpation of Vortigern, but returned with an army and, after burning Vortigern alive in his tower, assumed the crown. Later on he was poisoned by a Saxon and succeeded by his brother Uther.

14. *Uther*: according to the *Merlin Romance*, King Constance had three sons, the second and third being Pendragon and Uther; Pendragon fell in battle against the Saracens, and by Merlin's advice Uther took his name in addition to his own,

being known in future as Utherpendragon. Geoffrey, who gives the name Aurelius to the elder brother, ascribed his assumption of the name to the appearance in the sky at this time of a fiery dragon.

15. *either*: 'each of the two'.

17. *his Table Round*: Uther had given to King Leodogran a round table, which Merlin had made, and round which 150 persons could sit. This Leodogran presented to Arthur with his daughter Guinevere, and Arthur founded for it his famous Order of knighthood.

23 *wolf*: wolf-hunting was a favourite pursuit of the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons. As late as the reign of Henry III grants of land were sometimes made by the Crown upon condition that the wolves were kept down. They do not seem to have become extinct in England and Wales till the days of Henry VII.

*boar*: this animal, which was preserved as game by the early Norman kings, became extinct in England in the reign of Henry II.

*bear*: the Romans used to bring bears to Rome from Britain for bating and other forms of 'sport'. No mention is found of bears in England after about 1100.

28. *lent her fierce teat*: this is a common legend; thus Romulus and Remus are said to have been suckled by a wolf, a marvel which less credulous historians have prosaically interpreted by giving their foster-mother the name Lupa (Lat. 'she-wolf'). Outside fiction there do not seem to be any authentic instances of wolf-nurses; but there are plenty of records of 'wolf-like men', i. e. persons who were abandoned or lost in the woods in infancy and who grew up mere animals. That children have lived among wolves is uncontested (see Valentine Ball's *Jungle Life in India*, 1880).

31. *mock*: 'copy'.

34. *the Roman legions*: the Roman occupation of Britain lasted from A.D. 43 to 410, when the Emperor Honorius recalled his troops to defend Italy from the Goths. According to Bede, the Romans had completed their retirement before the death of Honorius (423), but later historians have described their withdrawal as being more gradual and extending from 402 to 436.

35. *Cæsar's eagle*: Caesar was the generic name for the Roman Emperors; the eagle, which was in early days only one of the Roman standards, was from the time of Marius (100 B.C.) adopted by all the legions. It was a small silver or bronze figure fixed to the top of a pole and carried before each legion into battle.

36. *Rience*, called in the Merlin Romance Raon, and by Malory Ryence, was king of North Wales. Later on he sent to Arthur to demand his beard to add to the eleven kings' beards with which he had trimmed his mantle.

43. '*He is not Uther's son*': for the origin of this doubt see below, ll. 136-83.

49. *he neither wore on helm or shield*: as the contrast is between 'helm' and 'shield', this should be 'he wore neither . . . nor', &c.

58. *drave*: thus, the northern form of the past tense, 'long held the field (as in the Bible versions) against the southern drove' (N.E.D.).

71. *Golots*: see below, l. 144; the name is taken from Geoffrey and is not found in Malory, who calls him simply 'the duke of Tintagil'.

72. *Anton*, called in the Merlin Romance Auctor, and by Malory Ector, was Arthur's foster-father; see below, l. 180.

74. *Travail*: 'pangs', the word 'travel' is the same word, which was applied to journeying, from the labour and suffering it entailed.

83. *waste dreams*: his hopes and schemes, he felt, could come to nothing if he failed to win Guinevere.

93. Feeling the suddenness of the transition from before the battle to after it, Tennyson here inserted in a later edition a passage of forty lines describing Arthur's victory over his rebellious lords and their allies.

94. *Ulfus*, whom the Merlin Romance calls Ulfins or Urfin, had been the favourite knight of Uther before Arthur was born; and Sir *Brastias* is mentioned as doing great deeds of arms before Uther died. Tennyson has altered the date of their knighthood. *Bedivere* was butler to the King; he reappears in *The Passing of Arthur*.

99. *Debating*: this hesitation on Leodogran's part is due to Tennyson; the Merlin Romance and Malory both depict him as eagerly accepting Arthur's suit.

100. *help*: the sixteenth-century past tense of 'help'; the past-participle 'holpen' occurs below, l. 119; cf. also the Magnificat (Luke i. 54).

109. *Merlin* was the son of a fiend and a mortal woman whom he had possessed against her will; he was gifted with a knowledge of the past by the devil, and of the future by God. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, he had been Court Magician since the days of Vortigern.

111. *Bleys* or *Bleise* was a hermit who after Merlin's birth saved his mother from the fiend and brought Merlin up. He lived in Northumbria and acted as chronicler to Merlin, who from time to time journeyed north to tell his master the events of the time.

119-21, i.e. 'You have given me no help at all'.

125. *the cuckoo* is noted for its usurpation of other birds' nests.

126. *And reason*: i.e. And there is good reason in or for their chase. This is intended as a pretty strong hint that he looks on Arthur as a usurper.



138. *baseborn*: used here for 'illegitimate', and not, as more commonly, 'of lowly birth'. See below, l. 197.

141. *my belief*: as the sentence is punctuated this noun has no construction.

145. *Tintagil* on the north coast of Cornwall has always been associated with King Arthur. Parts of the present ruins of the castle date from the twelfth century.

146. *Ygerne*: called by Malory 'Igrayne'; Tennyson has adopted Geoffrey's 'Igerne', which is also found in the Merlin Romance.

148. *Bellicent*: for this name of King Lot's wife Tennyson has gone to the Merlin Romance; Malory calls her 'Margawse', and Geoffrey 'Anne'.

149. *cleaved*: there are two verbs 'to cleave' in English, (1) the strong verb Cleave, cleave or clove, cloven, meaning to 'split', and (2) the weak verb Cleave, cleaved, meaning to 'stick'. Unfortunately the strong verb developed weak forms, cleaved or cleft; and the weak verb adopted the strong form cleave for its past tense, as appears from the Authorized Version of the Bible.

153. *bright dishonour*: such a contradiction in terms is called 'oxymoron' in grammar.

159. *Left her and fled*: this is not the Merlin Romance or the Malory version, which both represent Uther as procuring admittance to the castle by assuming, thanks to Merlin's magic arts, the likeness of Gorlois; cf. a similar stratagem of Jupiter's in the case of Amphitryon.

164. *Not many moons*: according to Malory, Arthur was born before the death of Uther, who himself delivered the baby to Merlin according to agreement.

166. *wrack*: an old form of 'wreck'.

169. *all before his time*: from the sense of totality came the idea of completeness, so that 'all' came to mean 'quite'; his mother bore him a good deal earlier than she had expected. So in the next line.

174-5. *were as the lords of this, Wild beasts*: Tennyson can hardly have intended this very strong language to apply to the peerage of his own day, to which he afterwards himself belonged, though in his poem 'The Third of February, 1852' he shows that he had no great respect for the House of Peers, and there was and is probably a good deal of truth—so far as many of them are concerned—in his statement that 'each But sought to rule for his own self'.

180. *Sir Anton*: see above, l. 72, n.

184. *foughten*: an archaic form of the past-participle which hardly appears except in the phrase 'a foughten field'.

202. *Mordred*: according to Malory—who calls him Mordred—he was Arthur's son by the Queen of Orkney, whom Arthur did not know for his half-sister, imagining that the foster-parents

who had reared him were his true parents. Merlin thereafter came, like Nathan to David, and told him that God was displeased with him, and that the child who should be born would destroy him and all the knights of his realm.

206 *A doubtful throne*, &c. 1 e. where there is a doubt as to the right by which a king holds the throne, that doubt is sure to grow till the king is ejected; as ice floating in temperate water is certain to melt.

209 *enow*. 'enough', of which it was originally the plural.

218. *strait*. 'strict'; the common meaning is 'narrow'.

219 *from kneeling*: 'after kneeling'.

224. *large divine and comfortable words* 1 e. what he said was animated by his own great heart, so that they received it as a message from God and took comfort

228. *thro' the cross* 1 e. a stained-glass window representing the crucifixion of Christ.

231. *vert and azure*: the heraldic terms for green and blue.

232. *three fair queens*: their introduction here is due to Tennyson; Malory does not mention them till after Arthur's last battle. When pestered by allegorists to say whether he had not intended these to represent Faith, Hope, and Charity, Tennyson said that they stood for that and a good deal more; 'they were beautiful women.' Tennyson, feeling he had told a noble story nobly, so that the dullest could read the ideal behind it, had no patience with his pettifogging admirers who tried to read an allegorical meaning into each detail; 'I hate to be tied down', he said, 'to say "*this means that*"'.

236. *mage*: 'magician'.

239. *the Lady of the Lake*: there is a mystery about this personage, who seems at times to become confused with Arthur's half-sister and deadly enemy Morgan le Fay, and with Niviane or Nyneue,—also called the Lady of the Lake,—who beguiled Merlin to his doom. Malory says that the lady who gave the sword had her head smitten off by Sir Balin when she came to Arthur's Court to ask a boon; 'for', said Balin, 'by her enchantment and witchcraft she hath been the destroyer of many good knights, and she was the causer that my mother was burnt through her falsehood and treachery.'

241. *samite*: a rich silk fabric sometimes interwoven with gold. The word is compounded of *six*, and *mitos* 'thread', though it is not certain why this material was called 'six-threaded'. Tennyson has taken the term from Malory or the Merlin Romance, both of which use it in this passage. It did not imply any special colour, for elsewhere in Malory we read of black samite.

242. *sword*: see below, ll. 251 sqq.; the name Excalibur means according to Malory 'cut-steel'. The scabbard was more precious than the sword, for whoever wore it should lose

no blood, be he never so sore wounded'. Malory, possibly from forgetfulness, gave the name Excalbur to another sword also, one which Arthur had wrenched from a stone after Uther's death, proving thereby that he was the rightful heir to the throne

250 *like our Lord* see Matthew xiv 25.

254 *row'd across and took it.* so Malory, in the *Merlin Romance* the Lady of the Lake walked across the water and fetched it for the king.

255 *elfin Urim* 'ornaments made by the elves'. *Urim* and *Thummim* [Heb. = 'lights and perfections'], were two mysterious objects, worn on or in the High Priest's breast-plate, by means of which he was able to exercise powers of divination. Commentators have exhausted themselves since the Christian era in trying to determine what these objects were and how they were used, Tennyson apparently accepted the theory that they were precious stones.

258 *the oldest tongue.* of course there is no oldest tongue, and if there were it would be unwritten, and even if written it would have been unreadable to men of Arthur's day.

269 *near akin* according to modern ornithologists these two birds 'have only an outward resemblance but no near affinity' (*Encycl. Brit*)

281 *Struck for the throne* 'Revolted in order to gain the throne'.

286-7. *far Beyond the race of Britons* the Britons were no purer in race than any other, but were formed of the mixture of several different races. Tacitus tells us that those on the south coast resembled the Gauls of the neighbouring coast, who were blonde, those in the west were dark, with curly black hair.

319. *a fairy changeling* a child who has been left by the fairies in place of one they have stolen. Such children were usually wizened half-starved creatures who never thrived.

325 *still* i.e. dead.

326. *by the chasm* Tintagel stands on a promontory separated from the mainland by a steep-sided cleft, the mediaeval castle stood on both sides of this, as the ruins show, but there is little doubt that the earliest structure was built wholly on the promontory

327-8. *a night In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost* on any moonless night it is impossible to see where the earth ends and the sky begins, so that this sentence cannot be taken to mean an unusual degree of darkness.

330 *It seem'd* sc. that it seemed

336. *a ninth one:* there was—and possibly is still—a belief that every ninth or tenth wave was bigger than the rest. De Quincey, in one of his delightfully gossipy notes, has an account of his attempt to prove the truth of this theory by

watching the waves, but he failed, as others have done, since his time, to discover any such regularity. Ovid believed the tenth to be the largest (*Thistia* 11 49, 50) the Greeks gave the same superiority to the third (see under *τρικυπία* in the *Lexicon*)

337 *full of voices* of Ezekiel *xlii* 2, 'His voice was like a noise of many waters', a phrase copied three times in *Revelation*

340 *A naked babe* · this account of the first appearance of Arthur appears to be of Tennyson's own invention, neither in Malory nor any of his sources had Arthur any but a natural birth of human parents.

345 *rose* · so the fringe rose.

347 *presently*. this word has considerably altered in meaning; originally it stood for 'immediately after', 'without any interval', in which sense it is now obsolete, its modern meaning is 'soon', 'after a short interval'. The same change has taken place in the words 'immediately', 'directly', &c. It is impossible to say which meaning Tennyson intended; the former would be more dramatic

348. *Free sky* · 'Clear sky'

351. *strait*: the path of death is termed narrow as it allows only of the passage of man's soul

358 *riddling triplets* these are founded on the triads or three-line verses of the old Welsh bards.

361 *wit* 'intellect'.

362 *lea*. a tract of open ground, meadow, pasture, or arable.

363. *truth is this to me, &c* i.e. there is for mortals no such thing as the truth what is true for one man may not be true for another.

364 *or clothed or naked* i.e. truth may be cloaked in dark sayings or it may be stated simply.

365. *Rain, sun, and rain*: the change of order is to be noted, here and in the next line, the phases of the weather coming alternately as typical of the life of man, which comes into being from the darkness—or the light—and returns whence it came.

367. *the great deep*. i.e. the depth of infinity.

375 *Speak* · i.e. 'will speak', the auxiliary being carried on from l. 370

378. *pass, again to come*. the same legend was current in Germany of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who died in 1189.

387. *looming* · 'appearing indistinctly'

388. *the hind*. 'the rustic'

389. *glimpsed*: 'shone faintly'.

391. *Stream'd* · the land was said to stream to the peak, because so thick a smoke poured from it that it seemed as if the land itself was floating upwards.

404. *Sir Lancelot*: he was the son of King Ban of Brittany; on his father's death he was carried away by the Lady of the Lake, who afterwards brought him up. Hence his name, Sir Lancelot du Lac.

409 *To whom* depending on 'was married', l. 412.

*Dubric*: Archbishop of Legions (i.e. Caerleon), according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Primate of Britain, taking precedence of the two other Archbishops of London and York.

411 *The statelyest of her altar-shrines*: this was the church of St. Stephen at Camelot (Malory)

415 After this line Tennyson inserted in a later edition eleven lines giving the mutual vows of Arthur and Guinevere, and after l. 420 he inserted twenty-eight lines giving the song of the Knights.

421. *came in from Rome*: according to Malory and Geoffrey of Monmouth, the embassy was sent by the Emperor Lucius, who is unknown to history. According to Zosimus, the only authority for the period, the Emperor Honorius, who recalled the Roman troops, granted independence to Britain. Geoffrey, however, who can hardly be considered an historian, says that Arthur after his refusal of tribute left the government in the hands of Modred and Guinevere and sailed with his army to Gaul, where Lucius was advancing to meet him. A great battle ensued in which the Romans were defeated.

422 *The slowly-fading mistress of the world*: the Roman dominions attained their greatest extent under Trajan (98-117), but some fifty years after his death the Germans began to cross the frontier. In the following century the empire was invaded by the Goths and the Franks on the north, and by the Persians on the east. From the middle of the fourth century onwards the Goths became an increasing danger, and in 410, under their leader Alaric, they besieged and took Rome, retiring thence to Spain, where they settled, establishing a kingdom which they held till the Moslem invasion.

425 *To fight my wars*: in a later edition Tennyson substituted the more accurate 'To wage'.

*worship* this word is so often used in the sense of 'pay divine honour to' that we are apt to forget its original meaning, which is merely 'to hold worthy' and so 'to honour'.

426. *order*: 'arrangement'.

429. *your Roman wall*: this is commonly ascribed to and called after Hadrian (117-38), who certainly carried a rampart and ditch with fortified stations along the line of camps which Agricola had set up from the Tyne to the Solway in A.D. 79. The 'stupendous wall of solid masonry' running a few yards to the north of the rampart, large fragments of which still exist, Merivale ascribes to the Emperor Theodosius, who lived two and a half centuries after Hadrian. In the reign of Antoninus

(138-61) another wall was built from the Forth to the Clyde; this also followed a line drawn by Agricola. The country north of Hadrian's wall was probably surrendered to the Picts a considerable time before the Roman withdrawal from Britain.

## THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

1. *Sir Bedivere*. see *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 94, n. Sir Bedivere, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, was already dead, having been slain in the battle against Lucius. See *ib.* l. 421, n.

2. *latest* poetically used for 'last'.

3. *was no more than a voice*: i. e. all his physical faculties had left him but that of speech.

6. *weird*: in its original sense of 'destined'. The noun 'weird' (= 'fate') is still used in the phrase to 'dree one's own weird', = endure one's own fate.

7. *Gawain kill'd*, &c. from the punctuation this must be an absolute clause, equivalent to 'after Gawain had been killed'.

8. *Lancelot's son*: according to Malory, Agravaing and Mordred, sons of Margawse (Bellicent), Arthur's half-sister, told the King of the amour between Lancelot and Guinevere, so that war broke out between the King and Lancelot. Sir Gawain, another son of Bellicent's, joined his uncle and with him invaded France, to which Lancelot had retired. After there had passed two terrific duels between Lancelot and Gawain, in each of which the latter was worsted, news came from Britain that Mordred, giving out that Arthur was dead, had caused himself to be crowned, and had appointed a day for his wedding with Guinevere. She, however, had escaped and taken refuge in the Tower of London, where Mordred was now besieging her. On hearing these tidings Arthur hastened to Britain and encountered Mordred at Dover, putting him to flight, but in the battle Gawain was mortally wounded.

10. *shrilling*: 'screaming'.

12. *an isle of rest*: see below, l. 403 and note.

29. *glamour*: 'enchantment'.

30. *ching*: this is subjunctive, expressing a wish, 'may they chng'.

33. *Light was Gawain in life*: Malory does not so depict him, but rather as the type of a perfect knight. In this he follows the earlier romances; for it is not until the Tristan Romance that we find a word against Gawain, in that, however, he is uniformly belittled and maligned.

36. *the steps of Modred in the west*: after the battle at Dover Modred was defeated a second time on Barham Downs between that town and Canterbury. Both armies then moved on to

Salisbury plain 'not far from the sea-side'; it was here, according to Malory, that the last great battle took place. Tennyson, however, places it farther west. (See below, l. 57.)

45 *the Roman wall*: see *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 429, n.

49 *they* owing to a change of construction this word is left without a verb

53 *One lying* Tennyson in *Guinevere* describes how, after Lancelot and Guinevere were detected by Modred, the Queen fled and took refuge in a nunnery at Almesbury (Amesbury in Wilts). Here she was visited by the King and fell at his feet, lying in the dust while he admonished her. This is not the version of Malory, which is less consonant with mid-Victorian opinion. In Malory, Guinevere after being detected awaits the King's coming and is by him sentenced to be burnt alive; but just before the fire is lighted she is rescued by Lancelot and carried off to Joyous Gard, his castle, where she stayed till the Pope sent his command to Arthur to take back the Queen and make peace with Lancelot. The latter, however, Gawain would not permit, as he was bitterly incensed with Lancelot, who unawares had slain two other brothers of Gawain to his own grievous sorrow. In Malory, the Queen retires to Almesbury only when she hears of Arthur's death.

54. *passes*: 'events', as in the phrase 'to come to pass'.

57 *sunset bound*: 'the western limits'.

*Lyonnesse* was the region to the south-west of Cornwall now covered by the sea, the Scilly Islands being the only part remaining above the water. Of course the land was submerged long before the dawn of history, but the tradition of its existence gave the old romancers—who knew nothing of geology and cared nothing for dates—sufficient ground for establishing King Arthur there.

58 *upheaven*: there is apparently no authority for 'heaven' as the participle of *heave*, though 'heaven' is found once in a Psalter of 1300.

67 *Burn'd at his lowest*: i.e. at the winter solstice, when the noonday sun is at its lowest in the sky.

68 *the waste sea*: an echo from Homer, with whom a favourite epithet for the sea is *ἀρπύρεος*, 'unfruitful'.

70. *weird*: see above, l. 6, n.

72. *drew*: in a quasi-passive sense = 'was drawn'.

84-6. These three lines are an attempt to make the sound echo the noise produced; this is called 'onomatopoeia'.

90. *filth*: 'disgusting language'.

93. *voices of the dead*: cf. above, l. 79.

94. *some one deathbed*: as distinguished from the field of battle, unless 'one' is a mere metrical convenience.

95-6. *or . . . Or*: poetic for 'either . . . Or'.

105. *Nor yet of heathen*: there were in Malory's account no

Saxons in this engagement, as in Arthur's 'twelve great battles', both sides were—at all events nominally—Christians. Tennyson represents Modred as using the heathen to support his usurpation, see below, l. 127.

111. *The voice of days of old*: i.e. the plash of the waves

118. *as tho' they had not died for me*: the waves of Britain ought, he suggests, to have respected those who had fought for the British king.

124. *and so*. 'and be it so that', 'provided that'.

125. *worship*: see *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 425, n.

129. *of thine house*. 'belonging to thine own family'. It is a descriptive genitive, not dependent on 'traitor'. So in l. 131, 'Do not say this traitor belongs to my family when he has but', &c.

136. *the purport of my thine*. 'the object of my reign'.

137. *quich*. 'alive'.

144. *Excalibur*: see *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 242, n.

146. What follows from this line to line 416 was first published in the *Poems* of 1842 (vol. II) under the title of 'Morte d'Arthur'. It was reprinted in 1865 in the *Poems* and first appeared in its present shape in the 1870 *Idylls of the King*, which was published in December of the previous year. The first four lines of the older part do not fit in very happily with what has gone before.

154. *strait*: 'a narrow tongue'.

158. *The sequel of to-day*: 'the result of this battle'.

*unsolders*: 'breaks up'. To solder is properly to unite two pieces of metal by the application of another metal in a molten state.

160-1. *Such a sleep They sleep*: this would appear to be a condensed expression for 'such is the opinion in which they are held after their death'.

165. *Camelot*: Arthur's court, which has been generally identified with Queen Camel near Yeovil in Somerset, where there still remain the entrenchments of an ancient—probably British—town. Malory, however, identified it with Winchester, and Caxton, his printer, placed it in South Wales. Of course, the geography of romances based on early legends does not admit of accurate description.

167. *that I should come again*: there is no such prophecy in Malory, who treats Arthur's birth and death as purely natural, though he adds, after telling of Arthur's death in battle, 'some men yet say, in many parts of England, that King Arthur is not dead; but had by the will of our Lord Jesu Christ into another place; and men say that he will come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say that it shall be so; but rather I will say, that here in this world he changed his life.'

172. *thou rememberest*: see *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 251 sqq.



- 175 *‘samite’*: see *The Coming of Arthur*, I 241, n.
181. *the middle mere*: a Latinism for ‘the middle of the mere.’
- 182 *lightly*: ‘quickly’; the word is taken from Malory.
- 187 *hest*: ‘command’, *behest* is the same word with a prefix at full. ‘fully’, a phrase found from the fourteenth century.
- 190 *And in the moon*: ‘and’ seems to connect ‘from the shrine’ with ‘in (=into) the moon (=moonlight)’.
- athwart*: i.e. which shone from side to side.
191. *mighty bones*: man has always been prone to attribute gigantic stature to his remote ancestors. Cf. ‘grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulcris’ (Virg. *Georg.* I. 497). The evidence of ancient skeletons and ancient or mediaeval armour points in absolutely the opposite direction.
- 194 *juts*: ‘projecting pieces’.
- 198 *skirts*: ‘borders’.
200. *haft*: ‘hilt’. It is derived from ‘have’, being the part by which the weapon was had or held.
201. *topaz-lights*: a topaz may be yellow, white, green, blue, or colourless.
- jacinth-work*: in ancient times the term was applied to a blue gem, probably the sapphire; in modern use it is the name of a reddish-orange stone.
205. *In act to throw*: ‘On the point of throwing’.
224. *lief*: ‘beloved’. It is often found coupled with dear, of which it is almost a synonym.
- 230 *chased*: ‘carved in relief’, only used of metal-work.
234. *Should thus be lost*: in strictness this ought to be ‘would’; ‘should be lost’ implies that it is advisable to lose it.
- 238 *the bond of rule*: ‘that which binds subjects to their rulers’.
- 253 *now*: i.e. by carrying out the king’s present orders.
- were* is subjunctive = ‘would be’.
266. *widow’d*: ‘bereft’.
- 269 *In whom should meet the offices of all*: ‘who ought to render the services due from all the others’.
275. *spare to fling*: ‘omit to fling’, a Latinism.
283. *like a streamer of the northern morn*: ‘like a ray of the Aurora Borealis’ or Northern Lights. This is a luminous phenomenon, supposed to be electrical, which was first observed as emanating from the magnetic north pole—hence the name; but as later observation shows a similar appearance in the antarctic, the adjective Borealis is generally suppressed and the lights termed simply auroras.
- 284 *the moving isles of winter shock*: ‘the icebergs crash together’.
287. *he dypt the surface*: N. E. D. gives no other instance of the word used in the sense of ‘to penetrate’. It is, perhaps, to be noted that at this its last appearance the sword is spoken

of as 'he' and 'him', having previously always been termed 'it'.

309 *to the margin*: sc. of the lake. It is, of course, useless to search for this lake on the map. We are told it lay in the western extremity of Lyonesse (l. 57), that it stretched far to the east (l. 415), and that it led to Avihon (l. 403), but the romances give us no further information.

314 *As in a picture* i.e. with the immovable stare of a portrait.

321 *a nightmare*: in its earliest meaning this denotes a female spirit who squats on persons and animals during sleep, producing a feeling of suffocation by her weight. She was also termed simply 'the mare', which is not the same word as that meaning a female horse. Since the belief in material spirits has generally vanished, the term 'nightmare' is used almost solely for a bad dream attended by feelings of great discomfort.

326-7. *looking . . . Larger than human*: the effect of the mist (l. 71) would be, as it usually is, to make everything appear larger than reality, but Tennyson seems to forget that the mist had blown away (l. 100).

329. *His own thought*: i.e. that by his delay he had risked the King's life.

330. *harness*: 'armour'.

337. *hove*: 'rose and fell on the water'.

339 *they were ware*: 'they noticed' 'Aware' is the same word.

341. *Black-stoled*: used loosely for 'black-robed'. The *stola* was properly a Roman lady's dress, a long tunic with sleeves, reaching to the ankles.

*by these*: sc. 'and beside these forms stood'.

342 *Three Queens*: see *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 232 and note. Malory, whom Tennyson has closely followed through all the scene between the King and Sir Bedivere, says the three queens were King Arthur's sister, Morgan le Fay; the Queen of Northgalis, and the Queen of the Waste Lands.

343 *tingling*. 'quivering', as applied to the stars, it means 'twinkling'.

357 *with'er'd*. i.e. grown pale and languishing as the sun rises.

358. *Smote*: archaic for 'smitten'.

359. *graves* are protective armour for the leg below the knee, *cusses* for the thighs.

*drops Of onset*: 'blood shed in a charge'.

362. *High from*: i.e. rising high from

368. *Camelot*: see above, l. 165, n.

372 *my forehead*. used, like the Latin *frons*, for the part of the face which expresses shame (or the reverse); so we speak of a brazen forehead—without any great appropriateness.

376 *the light that led, &c* the star of Bethlehem, see Matthew ii. 1-12 The holiness of these elders is a later addition, according to early legend they were magicians whose power had suddenly ceased at the birth of Christ, and who sought to regain it by their gifts.

379 *an image* as coming to its prime, then decaying, and at last breaking up

387. *what comfort is in me?* 'What comfort can I give thee?'

389 *within Himself*. 'by His own indwelling power'.

393 *like a fountain* i. e. ceaselessly pouring forth

395 *blind life*. 'a life of which they are not conscious'; they have life, but do not think about it

403 *the island-valley of Avilion* the British name of Glastonbury seems to have been Ynys yr Avallon ('the island of Apples'), this was Latinized as Avallonia, which appears in many monkish chronicles Glastonbury stands on a promontory formed by the windings of the river Brue, and in earlier times was practically on an island, owing to the extensive marshes which surrounded the town There are no traces of a valley in the neighbourhood; the town stands on a slight eminence, backed to the north-east by the conspicuous Tor or hill of St. Michael. Giraldus Cambrensis (d. 1220) says that in the reign of Henry II a search was made in the abbey on the faith of several ancient songs for the grave of King Arthur, and at a depth of sixteen feet a coffin was found, hewn out of solid oak, bearing the inscription, 'Hic iacet sepultus inclitus rex Arthurus in insula Avalonia' ('Here lies the famous king Arthur buried in the isle of Avalon'). Malory says that on the tomb there is written 'Hic iacet Arthurus rex quondam rexque futurus' ('Here lies Arthur who once was king and will be king again'), his version no doubt grew out of the other, which was too prosaic in fact and language for lovers of the marvellous

406 *Deep-meadow'd*. 'having meadows with deep (i. e. long) grass'.

407. *bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea*: 'hollows overarched with trees, at the end of which appears the sunlit sea'—a charming description of scenery not to be found near Glastonbury.

411 *fluting a wild carol*: the common swan known throughout Europe is mute, there is, however, a species known as the wild swan (*Cygnus Muscus*), a native of Iceland and north Russia, and a winter visitant of more southerly countries, which has a very musical note. The legend that it sang before its death is as old as the Greeks; it appears in Shakespeare (*Othello* v. ii) and is vouched for by Professor Erman of Berlin (d. 1861), who wrote, in his *Travels in Siberia*, 'This bird, when wounded, pours forth its last breath in notes most beautifully clear and loud'.

412 *plume*: 'plumage'

*takes the flood* 'takes to the water'.

415 *against the verge of dawn*: 'against the eastern horizon

417. *clomb*: this form of the perfect of 'climb' is found in poets from Spenser to the present time

425 *On that high day* see *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 213 sqq

437 *opening on the deep*. the mysterious lake (see note to l. 309) ended towards the east in the sea.

440 *the new year*: typical of the new order of things which was to begin with the passing of Arthur.

Malory does not leave Sir Bedivere so abruptly, but says that on the following day he came to a chapel and a hermitage 'fast by a tomb newly graven' wherein King Arthur had just been laid by 'a great number of ladies'. Sir Bedivere thereupon determined to spend the rest of his days with the hermit in fasting and prayers for the soul of his lord the King.

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